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ABSTRACT

This publication will provide secondary level students with a basic understanding of the development and structure of Chinese (guo yu) language characters. The authors believe that demystifying the language helps break many cultural barriers. The written language is a good place to begin because its pictographic nature is appealing and inspires confidence to decipher the rest. The first part of the publication presents and talks about some Chinese characters. After studying these characters, students are asked to translate a brief reading written mostly in English with some Chinese characters used for particular words and concepts. Chinese calligraphy is then discussed. To help students learn to write some characters, specific directions and illustrations are provided. A map showing where the various dialects are spoken is presented. The last part of the publication describes how to speak guo yu. A basic pronunciation guide is given. However, it is best if students can hear the language spoken. Teachers are asked to try to find a Chinese person to help them make a cassette tape of the simple conversation exercises. (Author/RM)

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ORACLE BONES AND MANDARIN TONES

Demystifying the Chinese Language

Project on East Asian Studies
in Education (PEASE)
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SO 013 766

THE CHINESE LANGUAGE

The Chinese language always seems to fascinate Americans, both in its written and spoken form. Though it takes many years of intense study to master the written language, a basic understanding of the development and structure of Chinese characters is easy to grasp. Demystifying the language helps break many cultural barriers as well.

Conversational Chinese taught in this country is usually the Mandarin Dialect or Guo Yu (National Language). Cantonese, however, is the dialect spoken in most Chinese-American communities. Why? It is the language of the Southern provinces of China, by their location a logical place for large scale emigration to begin (whether by choice or to flee civil strife, poor living conditions or with coercision from foreigners looking for cheap labor for home markets).

Provided one has a good ear and can distinguish and replicate tonal differences, Guo Yu is a fairly easy language in which to converse. Kids delight in hearing and trying to speak the language. The following are some sample lessons for you to try.

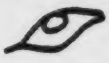
The written language is a good place to begin because its pictographic nature is appealing and inspires confidence to decipher the rest. Be prepared though, once students get into writing characters, they'll want to be able to pronounce them. A basic pronunciation guide is given, but ideally you need to hear it. Try finding a Chinese person to help you make a cassette tape of the simple conversation exercises. Better yet, get the students involved in getting this done.

With the simple vocabulary provided you and your students will be able to take some Chinese story material and create some "discovery projects" for others to decode back into English. Picture dictionary books or posters might be fun to try too.

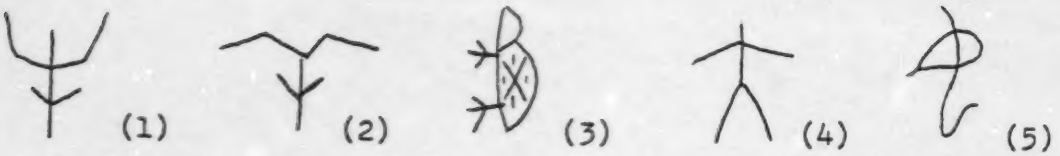
Don't be overly concerned with preciseness in trying the language. The object is to have fun and get a few insights into how and why the Chinese communicate as they do.

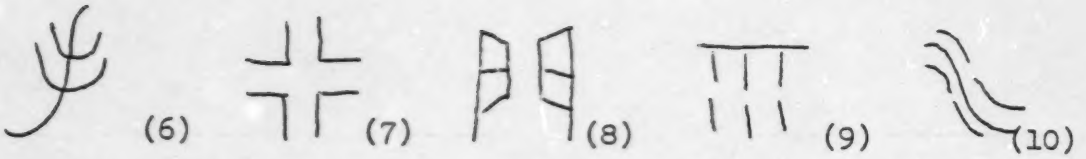
NB: A great little book for classroom use - THE CHINESE LANGUAGE FOR BEGINNERS by Lee Cooper, Charles E. Tuttle Co., Rutland, Vermont, 39 pages, $1.95.

The Chinese system of writing is unique and fascinating. As in Western civilizations, the first written symbols were pictures.

About 3,000 years ago Chinese characters were easily recognizable pictures.		Today these same characters look like this.
	EYEBROW	眉
	PERSON	人
	MOON	月
	SUN	日
	EYE	目

DISCOVERY PROJECT





Just for fun, try to guess the meaning of these old Chinese characters. NOTE: The third line shows the development of a single character, all have the same meaning.

KEY: (1) ox (2) sheep (note these two characters are based on the horns of the two animals) (3) turtle (4) big (person with outstretched arms (5) woman (woman kneeling holding baby in arms) (6) hand (note the five fingers) (7) crossroads (8) door (9) rain (10) water or river (11) shows development of the character for horse

Few modern characters are pictographs but are combinations of symbols or parts representing an object or a concept. Today there are about 40,000 Chinese characters but a well-educated person need recognize only 3,000-4,000 of them. Since each character must be memorized this can be a very time consuming task. Yet, learning Chinese can be fun!

Chinese characters are grouped by 'radical' or root. For example, 江 (river); 洗 (wash); 汀 (beach); and 汗 (perspiration) are all based on the water (氵) radical. 相 (to examine); 眉 (eyebrow); and 看 (to see) are based on the eye (目) radical. In the exercises below we can see how this works.

Take a roof 宀 and put a woman 女 under it 安 and you have "peace" ; put a pig 豕 under it 家 and you have a "house" ; put the same 豕 in an enclosure 圈 and you have a "pig sty."

A child 子 by the side of the woman 好 is "good" or "well".

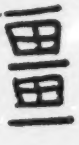
Three women 姦 is "adultry".

人 means "person" ; 众 is a "group, gathering or meeting". 人 in an enclosure 囚 is a "prisoner". 人 with open arms 大 is "large"; add a dot to large 太 and you have "too or too much" while one 人 following another 从 is "to follow" or "to obey".

The symbol 木 "tree" is found as part of many characters having to do with trees or wood. Can you guess what these combinations with 木 might mean?

林　　森　　宋

田 is the character for "field". What then could be the meaning of the following?



[人 as part of another character is frequently written 亻].

力 is "strength" or "effort". A man or boy 男 is one who uses strength 力 in the field 田 .

The character for sun has evolved from ⊙ to 日 and moon from 𠙵 to 月 . The sun on the horizon 旦 is "sunrise" or "dawn". Two moons together 朋 is "friend" or "companion".

Ideas and abstract concepts are more difficult to represent than objects. We have seen "peace" represented by 宁 ; "to obey" by 从 ; and, "large" by 大 , a person with open arms. How might you portray the following concepts pictographically?

A. BRIGHT
B. REST
C. QUARREL
D. UP, ABOVE
E. REWARD
F. PROMISE

林	GROVE	畾	THE FIELDS THE COUNTRY
森	FOREST	疆	BOUNDS; LIMIT; BOUNDARY
宋	A WOODEN HOUSE OR HUT	佃	FARMER

The Chinese depict these concepts as:

A. The 日 and 月 are combined for BRIGHT: 明

B. A 亻 beside a 木 is REST: 休

C. Two 女 together adds up to a QUARREL: 奸

D. A perpendicular line (丨) above a base line (一) is ABOVE: 上

E. A person who works 工 with much effort 力 is sure to be REWARDED: 功

F. A person's 亻 word 言 is a PROMISE: 信

Single characters alone are inadequate to convey all the words and ideas that form the written language. Two or more characters combine to form words and phrases:

人 人	EVERYONE
月 月	MONTHLY *
工 人	WORKER
人 力	HUMAN STRENGTH
上 月	LAST MONTH

* The same character is used for moon as for month. Do you know why?

Can you form any other words by combining characters we have already seen?

月	女	國	人	目
子	公	安	妙	三
一	豕	中	朋	下
家	佃	众	休	好
工	二	木	言	日

We now recogni
characters to

A few of these
you haven't se
Can you locate
cards and gues
meaning?

TO PLAY:

The words are
and the Chines
is covered. A
covered in any
(with all the
correct, of co
game.

In the center of each card is the character 中

In Chinese this means "middle" or "center".

中 國

These two characters mean "Middle Kingdom" or China. The game starts in

中 國

and everyone gets the center spot free.

男	豕	好	旦
木 木 木	女	木 木	國
家	明	中	下
目	一	月	囚
力	國	人	二

一 ONE	子 CHILD	力 STRENGTH EFFORT
二 TWO	女 WOMAN, FEMALE	工 WORK
三 THREE	众 GROUP	男 MALE, MAN
圂 PIG STY	大 LARGE BIG	旦 SUNRISE
豕 PIG	从 TO OBEY TO FOLLOW	朋 FRIEND
家 HOUSE	木 TREE	明 BRIGHT
安 PEACE	木木 GROVE	休 REST
目 EYE	木木木 FOREST	妏 QUARREL
人 PERSON	囚 PRISONER	下 UNDER, BELOW, DOWN
月 MOON MONTH	田 FIELD	上 UP, ABOVE
日 SUN	佃 FARMER	言 WORDS

DISCOVERY PROJECT

Now that we have seen Chinese is not as mysterious as it at first appears to be, let's decode the following story with the characters we have learned, the guide below and your imagination.

GUIDE

TEN	十	SAY	說
NO, NOT	不	MOTHER	媽
DAY	天	EAR	耳
SMALL	小	MOUNTAIN	山
DRAGON	龍	HEART	心
SHE, HE, IT	他	BOY	男子

TEARDROP DRAGON

Confucius said: *"When you repay kindness with kindness then the people are encouraged to do good."*

Once upon a time in 中國 there lived a 大龍. 他 cave was between 二 of the highest 山 in central 中國. Though no 人 dared to venture too near this 龍, 人人 knew where 他 lived because 他目 shone forth like 二日明 beacons in the evenings and could be 見 miles away. Usually when 明 仏 around an evening fire, they would end up whispering about this dreadful 龍 who lived so close to their fair village. Just because the 龍 was different, the 人 feared and hated 他 as if 他 were the devil himself. Indeed, many spoke of doing away with the 龍 though none was brave enough to try. 媽 would frighten 不好子 into 好 behavior by threatening to call the bogey 龍 to carry them away. Only 一小男子, named Pan Ch'ui, never trembled when 他 heard about the dreadful 龍. In fact, 他 did 不信 any of these wild tales. For that reason 人人 thought of 他 as "that funny 男子."

The 天 before Pan Ch'ui's birthday, 他媽 asked 他 whom 他 wanted to invite to 他 birthday celebration. To 他 astonishment, Pan Ch'ui 說, "The 大龍!"

"You must be fooling!" 說 他 bewildered 媽.

"不, I really am serious," 說 Pan Ch'ui. And because it was going to be Pan Ch'ui's very important 十 birthday, 他媽說 no more.

Immediately after breakfast, Pan Ch'ui slipped silently away from 他家. After hiking all 天 under the broiling 日, 他 arrived at the 上 of the 龍山.

"Yoohoo! Yoohoo! Honorable 大龍!" Pan Ch'ui shouted 下 into the black pit.

"Hello, who wants me? 說 大龍, exhaling a cloud of white smoke. Then 他 lumbered out to the valley.

Pan Ch'ui was almost paralyzed with fear, but 他 still 信 the 龍 was as 好子 as 他 was 大. 他 gathered up all 他 courage and 說 in a 小 voice, "I have walked all the way from the village to invite you to my birthday celebration.

There will be fireworks, fun, and food. Please say you will come, O 大龍!"

At first 大龍 could not 信 他耳. When Pan Ch'ui repeated 他 invitation 大龍 broke down and 哭 大 tears. Between sobs, 他說, "In all my born 天, no 人 has so much as spoken to me. Your invitation has touched my 心. Climb astride my back, Pan Ch'ui, and we shall journey 家 together."

下 a new river made of fresh 龍 tears they floated. Slowly but surely, 大龍 fierce appearance was changing. Before long that courageous, kind 男子 was sailing toward 他家 as commander of a handsome steamship named 大龍.

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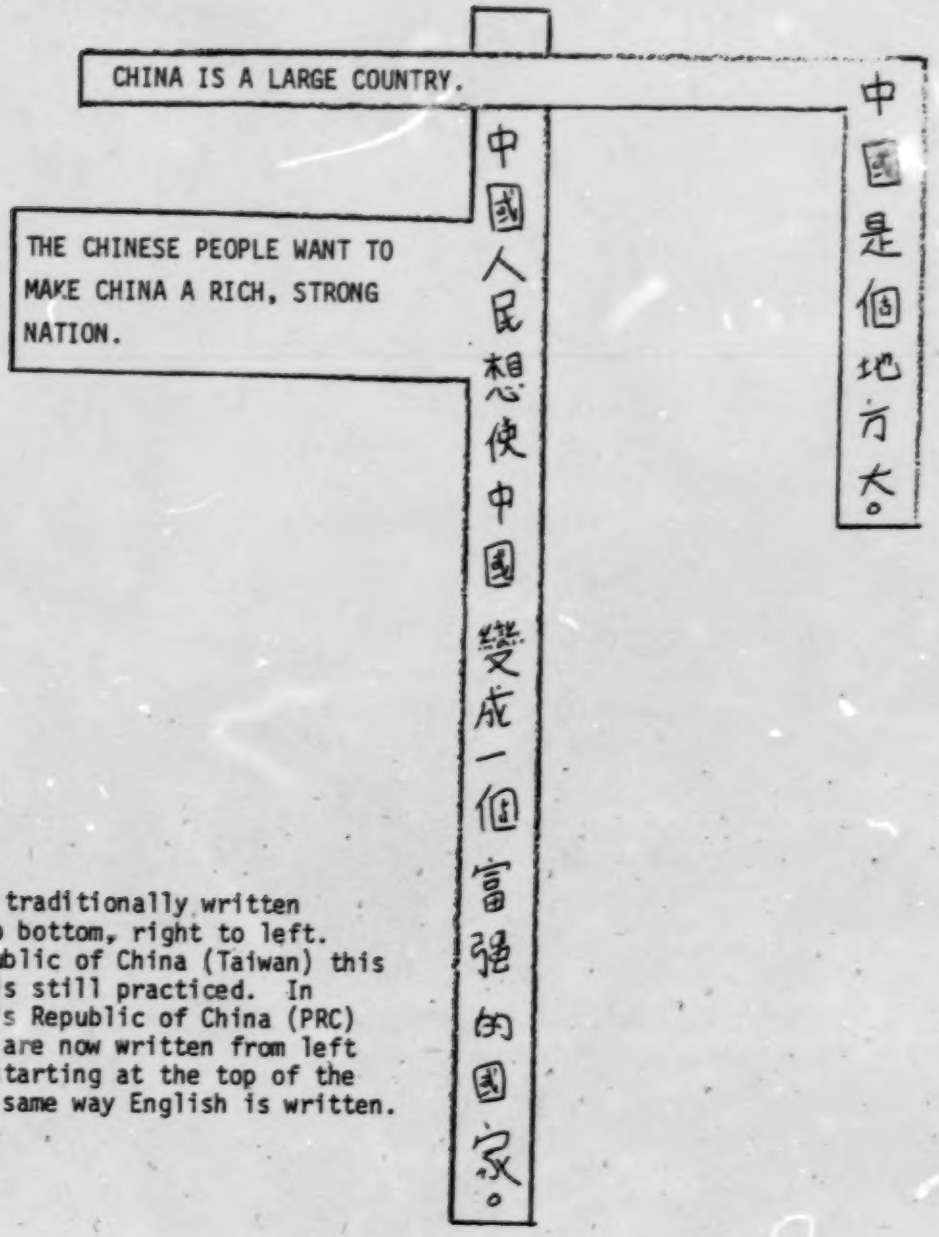
From Isabelle C. Chang, CHINESE FAIRY TALES, New York, Schocken Books, 1968.



Chinese is traditionally written from top to bottom, right to left. In the Republic of China (Taiwan) this tradition is still practiced. In the People's Republic of China (PRC) characters are now written from left to right, starting at the top of the page - the same way English is written.

Simplified characters were introduced in the People's Republic of China in 1956.

HORSE	馬	马
MOTHER	媽	妈
AGATE	瑪	玛
ANT	螞	蚂
TO SCOLD	罵	骂

What advantages are there in making characters as simple as possible?

What effect might simplified characters have on education?
[Keep in mind that to learn Chinese takes many hours every day for most students].

Calligraphy, the writing of elegant characters, has long been a highly regarded art in China. The materials used in calligraphy are the same as in painting -- brush, ink and inkstone. To write beautiful characters such as those in these examples takes years of practice.

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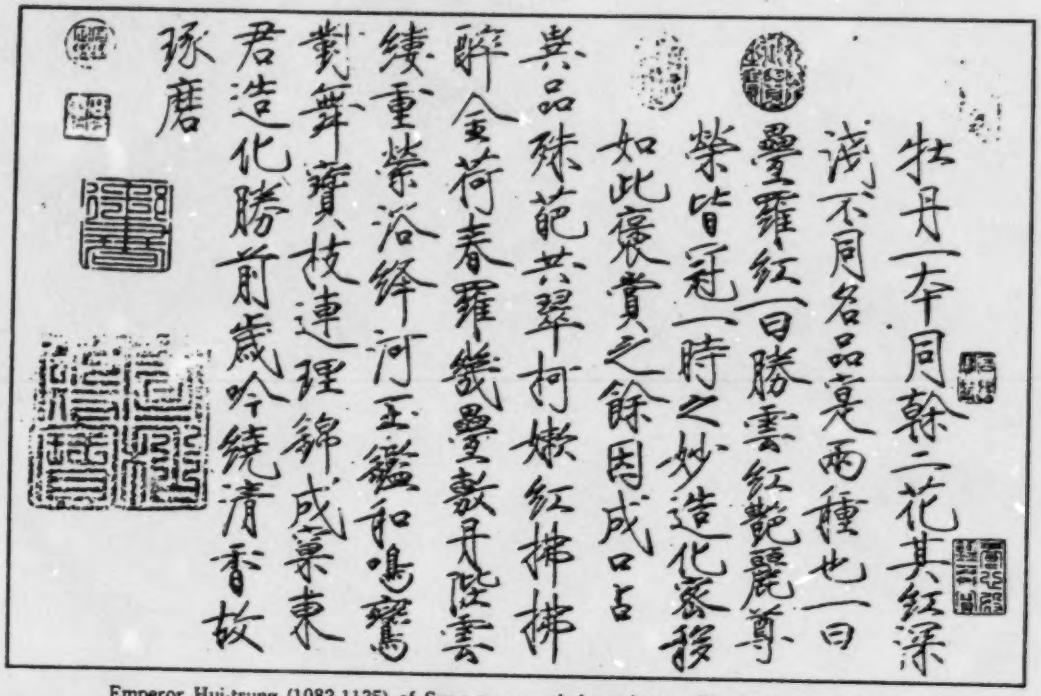
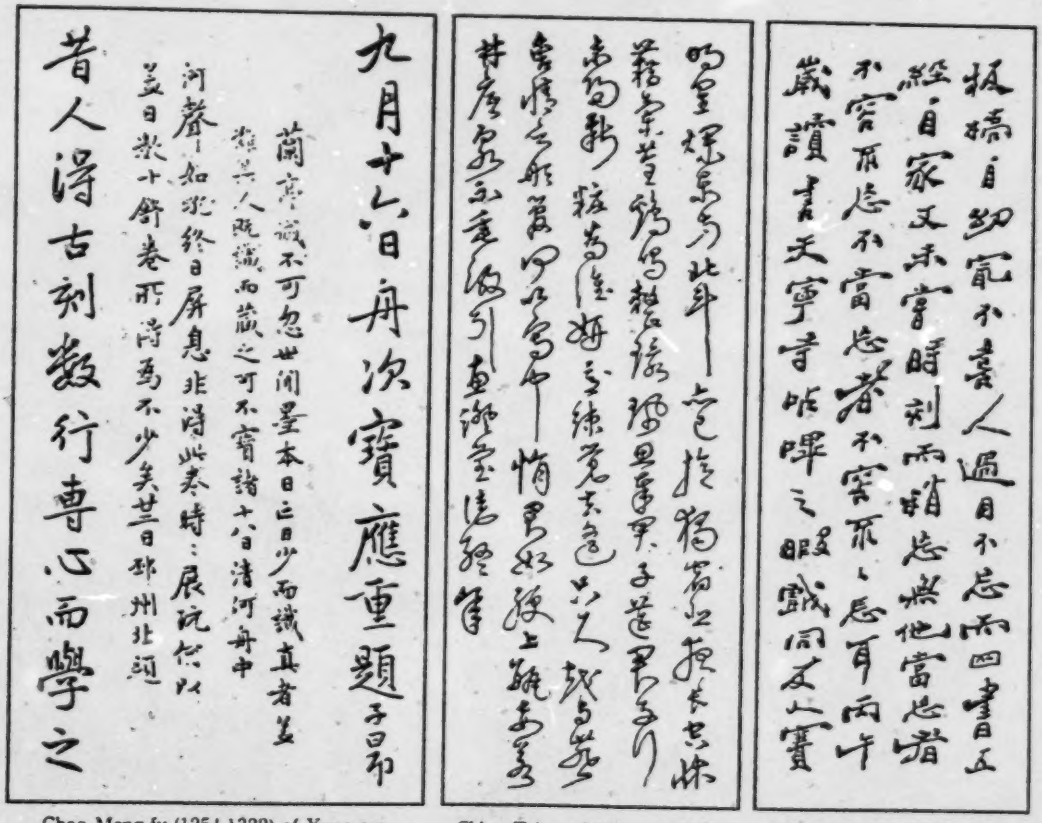


Emperor Hui-tsung (1082-1135) of Sung was a scholar-painter-calligrapher whose "slender gold" style of writing is said to reflect the fact that he was both tall and handsome



Cheng Hsieh (1693-1765) of Ch'ing was also a painter

Ch'en Ts'an of Ming gave his calligraphy a swinging upbeat

Chao Meng-fu (1254-1322) of Yuan era was an eclectic who combined styles

Calligraphy is done on a flat table. Hold your brush (a felt tip pen or crayon for a substitute) as shown in Diagram I.

Diagram I.

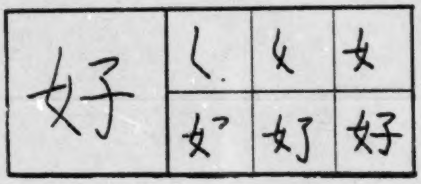
The brush should be perpendicular to the table as in Diagram II.

Diagram II.

Stroke order and direction are important in writing attractive Chinese characters. The basic principles generally observed are:

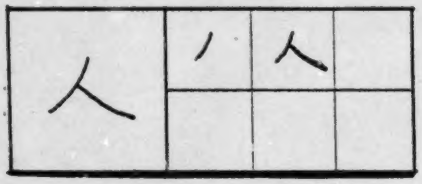
1. A character is written from its upper left hand corner to its lower right hand corner

hǎo
good, well



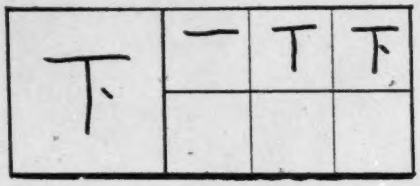
2. from left to right

rén
man, person



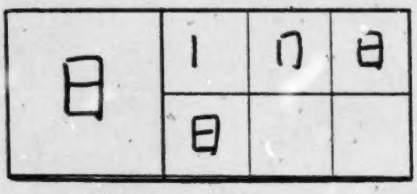
3. from top to bottom

xià
descend, lower, below



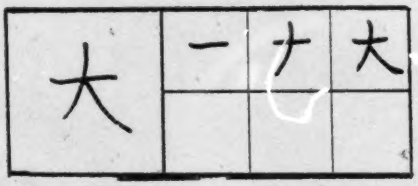
4. from outside to inside (with base lines being final stroke)

rì
sun



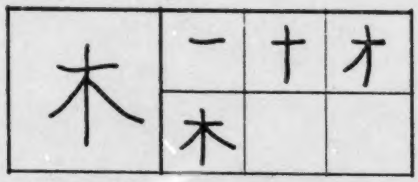
5. horizontal lines before lines that cross it

dà
big, large



6. center strokes before symmetrical strokes

mu
tree, wood



Strokes should be as square and proportional as possible. Students learning to write Chinese first practice writing characters in squares to get a feel for these proportions.

NOTE: Inexpensive calligraphy kits including brush, ink and inkstone may be purchased from: Kawahara Trading Post, 3126 Cass, Detroit, Michigan. (313) 831-9116.

好

人

下

日

大

木

Our culture, too, makes extensive use of symbols to convey ideas, concepts, directions, etc. We see these symbols in mathematics, in politics, as trademarks easily identifying a product or a company, as traffic signs and in many other ways. Some of these symbols may be recognized throughout the world. Music, for instance, made up completely of symbols has often been called an "International Language."

Can you identify and add to the symbols below?

Pretend we do not have an alphabet but you must send a message to a friend. Try writing the message in picture language and see if your friend can read it. Make up sounds for your pictograms and speak your own language.

As can be seen on the map, there are several Chinese dialects. These dialects are so different that people in one area may not understand the dialect spoken in another area. For the past twenty years, however, the Peking dialect has been designated the National Language (Guo Yu). Guo Yu is now used in schools and by the government uniformly throughout both the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China. That means more people in the world (one out of every four persons) speak Guo Yu than any other language.

Before the common use of Guo Yu, the problems resulting from differences in the spoken language were overcome by the use of a common written language. Although the pronunciation of a character varied, it had the same meaning for everyone who read it. This served as an important unifying device in a large country featuring such diverse spoken languages and customs.

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Fairbanks

East Asia: The Great Tradition

16

SPEAKING GUO YU

Unlike English which is a phonetic language (that is, sounds are composed of combinations of single letters), Chinese is built on syllables. Guo Yu utilizes fewer than 700 syllables. Therefore, the same sound has many different meanings. TONES, the rise and fall of the voice, are very important to distinguish one word from another. A Chinese syllable pronounced with a certain tone will convey a distinctly different meaning or no meaning at all when spoken with another tone.

In English, the way the speaker's voice rises and falls changes the meaning of the sentence but NOT of the individual word. For example: Are you going home? (Voice rises)

Go home. (Voice falls)

Home has the same meaning in each of the sentences.

In Chinese, the tone of each word is constant, independent of its context within the sentence. Home would be pronounced with the same tone in both of the sentences. If home were pronounced with another tone, it would be a different word (character) with a different meaning.

English speakers often use the tone of their voice to express feelings, but the meaning of the words still stay the same.

Let's go !! (strong, definite tones)

Let's go... (sigh, not much enthusiasm)

Let's go? (questioning)

If we try to use tones to express feelings in Chinese, we very likely change the meaning. How do you think Chinese might then get their feelings into what they are saying? (Watch two Chinese in conversation sometime...they are usually extremely animated.)

Guo Yu has four tones (other dialects have as many as nine!) These tones are denoted on pronunciation syllables by marks.

1. — high and level
2. ˊ high and rising
3. ˇ dipping -low, fall, then rise
4. ˋ low, emphatically falling

To illustrate the four tones and the different meaning each can convey to the same syllable, let's take the syllable ma :

1. mā 媽 mother
2. má 麻 hemp
3. mǎ 馬 horse
4. mà 罵 to scold

As can be seen, there are fewer problems with the written language as each meaning has its own distinct ideograph. (The common 馬 in the three characters gives a clue to their common ma pronunciation)

The use of the tones does not erase all problems. In spoken Chinese there are still many homonyms, words that sound the same, but have different meanings (in Chinese that means the same syllable with the same tone.)

Mǎ, for example, may mean 瑪 "agate" or 螞 "ant"
Má, can mean 蟆 toad or 痲 measles.

Usually the context of a sentence will make it clear which meaning is intended. In cases where this could be confusing (for example, "I sat on a mǎ" - agate or ant?) Chinese will often clarify by tracing the ideograph or correct character in the air or palm of their hand; this is equivalent to English speakers spelling out a word for clarification- "Do you mean p o o r or p o u r? d i e or d y e? a t e or e i g h t?"

CONVERSATION EXERCISES

Chinese grammar is relatively simple compared to English. Chinese has virtually no verb conjugations; "to buy", "buys" , "bought", "have bought", "shall have bought" are all said in a single word form mai. In Chinese we rely on the context to indicate the tense.

There are some simple patterns which will get us started in speaking Guo yu.

VOCABULARY

我 wo - I		好 hao - good	
你 ni - you		忙 mang - busy	
他 ta - she, he, it		累 lei - tired	
		很 hun - very	

PATTERNS

Ni hao ma ? - How are you?
(you good ?)

Wo hao. - I'm fine.
(I good)

Wo hun hao. - I'm very well.
(I very good)

Wo bu hao. - I'm not so well.
(I not good)

CAN YOU UNDERSTAND THESE SENTENCES?

Ni mang ma? (Are you busy?)

Wo mang. (I am busy)

bu mang. (not busy)

Ni lei ma ? (Are you tired?)

Wo hun lei. (I'm very tired.)

bu lei. (not tired)

Ta lei ma? (Is she tired?)

ANOTHER SIMPLE, COMMON PATTERN

In asking a question use the negative bu and repeat the verb.

Ni hao bu hao? How are you?
(you good not good?)

Ni mang bu mang? Are you busy?

Ni lei bu lei? Are you tired?

PRACTICE ASKING AND ANSWERING QUESTIONS WITH EACH OTHER

Ni hao ma?

Hao. Ni hao ma?

Hen hao.

Ni mang bu mang?

Hen mang

Ni bu lei ma?

Wo bu lei.